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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MANILA HOSTS SOUTHEAST ASIA REGIONAL  
CONFERENCE AIMED AT IMPROVING REPORTING

REF: MANILA 3415

1. (U) Embassy Manila hosted the 2005 Southeast Asia Reporting Officers Conference, October 13-14. Thirty-eight participants from Missions in Southeast Asia and other posts in EAP, as well as from the Department and Pentagon, participated in the two-day event. A full list of participants is included in Para 7.

2. (U) After Charge d'Affaires Paul W. Jones opened the conference with introductory remarks, participants engaged in lively panel discussions on a wide range of political, economic and public health issues. The overarching goal of the eight panels was to stimulate debate on current issues and trends of critical interest to U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia, and to share ideas and best practices to make regional reporting more effective and relevant for the end-user.

3. (U) Panels on political-related issues included discussion of the following topics:

-- Counterterrorism: Participants reviewed the seriousness of the threat posed by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Southeast Asia, with specific focus on Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, and the means by which various host governments have responded to the threat. S/CT briefed participants on ways USG counterterrorism funds can be used to help host governments address these threats.

-- Regional Organizations: Participants discussed the evolving roles of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and other regional fora, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS). Participants also proposed strategies on managing relations with host governments and publics in the face of increasingly strong engagement by the Chinese government.

-- Domestic Politics: Using examples based on recent Philippine politics, the panel addressed ways to improve communication between Missions and Washington during domestic political turbulence in order to keep reporting focused on key issues. A panelist from Bangkok shared lessons learned from the response to the December 2004 tsunami, particularly on ways to improve inter-agency

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coordination. The panel also examined unions as a political force.

4. (U) Panels focused on economic-related issues included discussion of the following topics:

-- Trade and Investment: Panelists discussed ways to more effectively report on non-tariff barriers to trade and how to apply lessons learned from the recent Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Singapore to future trade-focused negotiations in the region.

-- Financial Economy Issues: Participants proposed ways to more accurately assess local investment climates and discussed how to prepare for possible scenarios such as further oil price rises.

5. (U) Other sessions addressed the following issues:

-- Trafficking in Persons (TIP): Participants discussed the scope of the transnational trafficking problem in the region and shared best practices to encourage stronger host government and NGO action to combat TIP.

-- Public Health: Experts on the panel debated the effectiveness of the regional response to avian influenza and assessed preparations by Missions if there is a major outbreak in the region. Washington participants suggested possible sources of funding for local public health initiatives.

-- Making Reporting Even More Relevant: Participants shared knowledge of how to improve reporting in all areas such as: making the best use of FSNs; communicating with peers in Washington in order to keep reporting focused and relevant; and utilizing officers in all cones to support advocacy and

outreach activities.

16. (U) Mission truly enjoyed the opportunity of hosting a broad cross-section of colleagues from Southeast Asian posts, other EAP posts, and from Washington, and to showcase the beauty and history of the Chancery property in Manila. The Political Section in Manila offered to serve as a clearinghouse for other Missions who may wish to host the function in 2006.

17. (U) Participants in the 2005 SE Asia Reporting Officers Conference October 13-14:

Southeast Asian Posts:

Colin Crosby (Bangkok)  
Jeremy Nathan (Bangkok)  
Peter Thorin (Bangkok)  
Trent Wilson (Bangkok)  
Beatrice Camp (Chiang Mai)  
Elizabeth Wharton (Dili)  
Benjamin Moeling (Hanoi)  
Janet Speck (Hanoi)  
Ruth Hall (Jakarta)  
Lissa McAtee (Jakarta)  
Henry Rector (Jakarta)  
John Finkbeiner (Kuala Lumpur)  
Jeffrey Hilsgen (Kuala Lumpur)  
Brian Phipps (Kuala Lumpur)  
Cleveland Charles (Manila)  
Timothy Cipullo (Manila)  
John Groch (Manila)  
Robert Ludan (Manila)  
David Maness (Manila)  
Joseph L. Novak (Manila)  
Paul O'Friel (Manila)  
Machut Shishak (Manila)  
Aye Aye Thwin (Manila)  
Steve Worobec (Manila)  
Jennifer Spande (Phnom Penh)  
Teresa Manlowe (Rangoon)  
Paul Horowitz (Singapore)  
Christopher Kavanagh (Singapore)

Micronesia:

Stephen Druzak (Kolonias)  
Darlene Korok (Majuro)

Australia:

John Warner (Canberra)  
Antoinette Hurtado (Canberra)

Washington, DC:

LTC Russell Bailey (OSD, Pentagon)  
Karen Chandler (S/CT)  
Nathaniel "Chip" Dean (EAP/MTS)  
Brian McFeeters (EAP/MTS)  
CDR Cynthia Thebaud (Joint Staff, Pentagon)  
Andrew Vincent (INR/EAP)